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## The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities From Their Christian Churches, by James Tunstead Burtchaell

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rage in defense of the colleges.

On the contrary, there is much passion in these pages, the passion of men and women of conviction and ability, charged with the unenviable task of keeping the vision alive while responding to the demands of change in both Church and civil society. The values of the Gospel remain constant but the manner of heralding them must take account of the realities in which we find ourselves. The success of these chancellors, presidents, elders, trustees, and orders and the rightness of their choices in many cases can be measured—at least from the Catholic perspective—by the enduring presence of so many undeniably Catholic centers of learning and research across the United States. Catholicism is graced by the witness they give and the ministry they perform. Burtchaell acknowledges that it is a melancholy tale which he tells. This is understating it. It is a chronicle of alleged equivocation, concealment, and deceit; of failure to keep faith and betrayal of principle; of greed and acquisitiveness; of pride and of prejudice in power-hungry administrators and self-serving academics; a sorry tale of innocence and a fall from grace. “Most of the colleges examined no longer have a serious, valued or functioning relationship with their Christian sponsors of the past,” (p. xi) he writes.

The estrangement between churches and colleges was effected by men and women who said and apparently thought that they wanted them to be partners in both the life of the spirit and the life of the mind, but they concealed from themselves and from some of their constituencies the process of alienation as it was under way. There is considerable self-deception in these narratives. (p. xi)

He concludes,

The failures of the past so clearly patterned, so foolishly ignored, and so lethally repeated emerge pretty clearly from these stories. Anyone who requires further imagination to recognize and remedy them is not up to the task of trying again, and better. (p. 851)

These are serious allegations that most certainly must be answered. The gauntlet has been thrown down and the challenge needs to be accepted. Integrity is both the cause and the prize.

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*Reviewed by Jeffrey Gros, FSC*

**C**atholic colleges and universities served the dioceses and their bishops in the wake of Vatican II as a principal source for the transmission of the

Catholic heritage and its renewal as articulated in the Council. During the 1960s and 70s the administrators of many of these Catholic institutions drew on these resources for the renewal of Catholic identity in higher education. Others resisted the Council or left the identity question to theology departments and campus ministers. Still others were driven by financial development, recruiting, research, and preprofessional preparation concerns, presuming but not attending to their heritage. A few even moved away from their Catholic identity and religious sponsorship. In the 1980s and 90s, more than a quarter of a century after the beginnings of renewal, life in Catholic higher education has become more complex and diverse.

This volume is an important contribution to the discussion of higher education, from a neoconservative ideological vantage point in the culture wars debate. It is a comparative study of Catholic and a wide spectrum of Protestant institutions; it documents the Christian contribution to American higher education as a corrective to those who would attribute this intellectual enterprise to more secular sources; and it provides a cautionary tale for all religious institutions as they take on the delicate task of renewal and inculturation. Even those who do not share the same critical perspective of author James Burtchaell or who question some of the data on which his conclusions are based will find stimulating and important debates about Christian higher education.

The book is a series of case studies done during the 1990s, church tradition by tradition, of colleges and universities as they have developed from church sponsorship and centers of Christian learning to more or less tenuous relationships with their heritage and Christian identity.

The traditions covered include Congregationalists (now the United Church of Christ), Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Evangelicals, and Catholics. Each study begins with a brief survey of the ecclesiology of the church, its U.S. cultural development, and the relationship taken to higher education, as the author sees it. These are followed by case studies of two or three institutions and their evolution to more autonomous status and tentative relationships with a Christian identity. Each section ends with some reflections on the process. The volume concludes with a chapter that attempts to give a unified story to these accumulated histories.

The thesis of the volume is that there is an inexorable drive from Church sponsorship, support, and identity to a secular autonomy with, for the most part, merely a platitudinous relationship to the church of origin. The institutions surveyed conform, more or less, to the pattern the author lays out. He doesn't attempt to provide a monocausal explanation, but documents ecclesiastical ineptitude, faculty academic specialization, administrative defensiveness, survival needs driving institutions to radical capitulation to the culture, the rise of professional preparation over liberal arts, prospects of state funding, and the shift away from an *in loco parentis* approach to campus ethos,

among others. Indeed, the variety of contexts, ecclesiologies of the churches, and diversity of programs makes the generalizations tenuous at best.

However, in Burtchaell's conclusion he attempts an analytical, theoretical summary of what has happened. "The critical turn of allegedly Christian colleges and universities in the United States has been a modern rerun of the degradation of an unstable pietism through liberal indifferentism into rationalism" (p. 843). He points up the irony that when a critical, irenic theology was emerging that could serve both the openness and the Christian commitment of higher education, many schools were shifting towards a neutral religious studies program and diminishing the role of religion among the core requirements.

The data of the individual case studies will have to be judged by specialists. However, the polemical tone and the nonscientific, sarcastic dismissal of such values as affirmative action hint that there are other stories to be told. Indeed, some of the case studies could be used, in their present form, to document the struggle entailed, successfully, to maintain and promote Christian identity in an academic and ecclesiastical culture not always adept or even receptive to Christian higher education.

The Catholic institutions selected, New Rochelle, Boston, and St. Mary's of California are quite different and are, of necessity, unrepresentative. However, some of the larger Catholic movements are touched upon as well: the Land O' Lakes statement, the Jesuit Education Association, and the Webster, St. Louis, debates. Interestingly, the variety of diocesan-ecclesial relationships represented in these institutions, and in the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* discussion process, do not surface in the data.

These essays document quite clearly the importance of the presidents, the faculty, and the implementation of concrete promotion policies in insuring the Christian character of higher education. They also demonstrate that problems of transmission of the Christian faith and supporting Christian institutions are ecumenical ones and not peculiar to any of our churches. They show that vows, oaths, and mandates are not sufficient for building faith communities or committed administrations and faculties. Even mission statements and policy formulations, of themselves, do not accomplish the task.

The Holy See has continually articulated the importance of inculturation in recent years. The 30 years of reflection and the last six years of formal dialogue among bishops and university leadership have deepened the understanding of Catholic academic culture, ecclesial solidarity, and interdependence. While the near unanimous consensus of U.S. bishops on the matter is still in the process of reception, there have been great learnings as to how to enhance communication and genuine ecclesial communion as a Church. This study shows, however, that inculturation is quite a different question than acculturation to a civil religion or academic culture. Transitions cannot proceed without critical vigilance.

The dialogues expanded in the U.S. by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* hold out promise for ongoing structures of collaboration serving the intellectual mission of the Church. Many bishops have had a chance to listen and learn. Many colleges and universities have had a chance to see the Church's mission in a more intense way. This process, building on the struggles of the 1960s-1980s, seems to hold more promise than whatever juridical recommendations might emerge, as this study shows.

It is to be hoped that this volume will stimulate research that will demonstrate the positive contribution of Christian higher education to ecclesial renewal. It will be helpful to signal some models of ecclesial fidelity and leadership in the variety of traditions studied in this volume. Indeed, collaboration is not only possible, but essential for the churches' mission in the intellectual component of American culture for the future impact of the Gospel in our society.

The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by both reaction to the preconciliar Church and resistance to the Council. The 1980s and 1990s have shown reaction to the 60s and 70s. For the future the real question is how the churches together can support their higher education mission and how Christian academic institutions can find appropriate ways of transmitting the intellectual heritage of Christianity and human culture in an environment so much in need of this Christian and intellectual mission.

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## LEARNING FROM SCHOOL CHOICE

PAUL E. PETERSON & BRYAN C. HASSEL, EDITORS. BROOKINGS INSTITUTION PRESS, 1988.

*Reviewed by Edwin J. McDermott, S.J.*

**T**he title of the book is the message. It discusses what has been gleaned from the last 20 years of debate on school reform; the arguments of both political parties on new policy statements; the countless surveys regarding alternative schooling; and the arguments for and against vouchers, charter schools, and parental choice. This book presents theoretical arguments and empirical evidence on changes in the country's educational system.

The essays in this book were originally presented at the conference "Rethinking School Governance," sponsored in June 1997 by Harvard's Program on Educational Policy and Government.

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